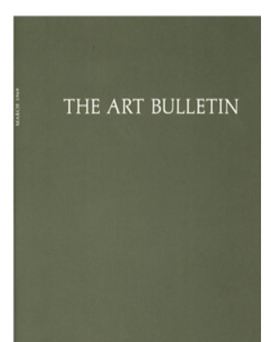


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BYZANTINE CARVED MARBLE SLABS

CARL D. SHEPPARD

A great mass of decorative sculptural material about which relatively little is known exists in the areas once belonging to the Byzantine empire.[1] The iconography, the chronology, and to a certain extent the styles of these sculptures are the subject of this paper, whose conclusions must remain, because of the state of our present knowledge, very tentative. The material in question consists of marble slabs, plaques, and transennae varying in height and width but generally two to three feet high, three to five feet long, and about two to four inches thick. Each is carved in low relief, for the most part with nonfigurative motifs or at least non-historiated subjects. Similar material in western Europe, particularly Italy, has been studied,[2] but only one serious, yet partial, study exists for the Byzantine field.[3] For neither region do enough slabs with definite dates exist that an unquestionable chronology or evolution has been established.

In general the slabs range in date from the fifth through the tenth century in the West and to the fifteenth in the East. They belonged to cultures in which sculpture in the round was no longer in demand by secular government or by established religion as it had been during the Early Christian period. The continuing affirmation of spiritual over material values during the fifth and sixth centuries increased an already established aesthetic preference for two-dimensional as opposed to three-dimensional sculpture.[4] This was accompanied by the abandonment of monumental representation in sculpture as well as by the gradual replacement of relief in marble or stone by relief, smaller in scale, in materials such as ivory, steatite, silver, and gold. The use of relief techniques for representation was maintained throughout the whole of the Middle Ages, but the usual small scale and the semiprecious quality of the materials normally utilized resulted in an iconic effect subject to the same aesthetic rules prevailing in painting. These artifacts could serve as symbols for a spiritual, even imperial reality, but never for the substances of phenomenal reality.

During this period marble instead of stone was used wherever possible for transennae, undoubtedly because of their relation to architecture. Late Antique–Early Christian style had established the use of highly polished marble wall revetments for all structures of importance. A flat wall plane covered with luxurious materials continued to be the dominant mode of interior treatment in Byzantine buildings until the fall of the city. The same taste continued in Italy, except for Lombardy and Apulia, until the Gothic style of the thirteenth century. In northern Europe the change occurred about two hundred years earlier. It is significant in regard to the prestige of marble, however, that even during the eleventh and into the twelfth century in Europe this material retained its favor. Early Romanesque tympana, jamb elements, lintels, trumeaux, and capitals were normally executed in marble rather than in the stone or brick used for the building of which they were a part.

Marble transennae functioned primarily as elements of architecture or as what is known as "church furniture." The slabs were used for balustrades in galleries or to close off a specialized feature, such as a choir, bema, or baptismal area. They were also used in the construction of pulpits, thrones, fonts, and commemorative monuments, particularly sarcophagi.

Iconography

A catalogue of subjects found on non-historiated transennae from the Early Christian centuries includes the following: fowl—particularly ducks and other aquatic birds, peacocks, eagles, and harpies; quadrupeds—deer, both doe and stags, rabbits, fox, bovines, felines such as leopards and lions, and griffons; fish—dolphin and smaller edible types; trees including palms and coniferous types; pine cones, plants, and many kinds of leaves; arches and columns; the grape vine; cantharii; different types of crosses; shells; rosettes of many variations; knots; wreaths; ribbons; lily buds; interlaces, plaits, and interweaves. Although most all of these subjects or motifs continued to be used as decorations, there is a noticeable dominance after the seventh century of the latter categories. The appearance of any kind of living being gives an archaic flavor to monuments of the later centuries. Whatever new motifs were added belong exclusively to the categories of rosettes, plaiting, knotting, and foliate elements.

The range of motifs decorating the slabs, regardless of original purpose, is astonishingly small and does not change very much in time. Motifs were gradually transformed, occasionally abandoned or revived, but iconographically they remained almost constant. It is very difficult now to distinguish with any ease by motif the original use of a relief. The range of subject was sufficiently broad or the symbolic implications sufficiently imprecise to include all the uses for which these carvings were ordered. The iconography was established during the Early Christian period and maintained throughout the whole existence of the art. In time, by the tenth century at least, these motifs were interchangeable in their symbolism; they had become equivalents and had the same general meanings, whatever their ultimate Christian origins and their contemporary functions.

These symbols were originally brought together to represent different concepts of paradisian gardens; many pre-existed in the pagan, Iranian, and Semitic worlds in similar contexts. It is in the Islamic arts that they are still to be found, specifically in textiles. E. R. Goodenough concluded that "... Jews obviously favored some pagan symbols, definitely avoided others. ... The selective vocabulary is, however, extremely interesting, because it is exactly the vo-

1 Research for this article was begun during a Fulbright grant to Turkey. I would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection for permitting me to use their resources, and the University of Minnesota for giving me a quarter leave.

2 R. Kautsch, "Die Langobardische Schmuckkunst in Oberitalien," *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, römische Abteilung*, 5, 1941, 1–48; E. Doberer, "Die ornamentale steinskulptur an der Karolingischen kirchenausstattung," *Karl der Grosse*, 3, Dusseldorf, 1965, 203–33.

3 R. Kautsch, "Die Römische Schmuckkunst in Stein-vom, 6 bis zum 10 Jahrhundert," *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, römische Abteilung*, 3, 1939, 1–73, esp. 61–73.

4 A. Grabar, "Plotin et les origines de l'esthétique médiévale," *Cahiers archéologiques*, 1, 1945, 14–34.

cabulary of Early Christian borrowings from paganism, a fact suggesting . . . the pagan emblems came into Christian art from Jewish usage."[5] In the Early Christian period these motifs were adapted to symbolize Christian salvation and were used to illustrate the Garden of Eden, the Fountain of Life, and the Paradise of God's eternity, the New Jerusalem.

The Church itself, *ecclesia,* was referred to as Paradise.[6] The transennae used in religious structures were and continued to be decorated with symbols appropriate to this concept. However conscious their selection may have been in each instance, their continued use indicates that they were felt to be definitely appropriate for their function. Irenaeus, in the second century, wrote, "The Church is planted as a Paradise in this world."[7] Gerhart Ladner, who quoted Irenaeus's words, continued, "Similarly, for the author of the *Epistle of Diognetus* those who love God rightly 'have been made a Paradise of delight' and for Origen baptism can mean entry into Paradise, namely into the Church. Comparisons between the Church and Paradise still play a considerable role in the fourth century. . . ."

"The allegorical interpretation, most favored by Augustine and many others would make of Paradise a figure of Ecclesia, or Christ and Ecclesia, and of the four rivers the representation of the four Evangelists."[8] The baptismal creed of the Early Christians is replete with paradisian references and images. Baptism led to Paradise. The Church creed is apparently dependent on that of baptism and the Paradise concept is borne along with it.

In referring to the general character of Early Christian iconography André Grabar observed, "It will be noticed [that] there is a curious unity . . . which very consciously applies the same images to the decoration of a reliquary as to a church (or to the choir of a basilica) . . . the garden of Paradise," and he cites among other examples the apse of Sant'Appollinare in Classe in which the "Triumphal Cross is joined to the theme of Paradise."[9]

Most of the motifs enumerated above are to be found in Early Christian monuments in connection with scenes of Paradise. For example at Sant'Apollinare in Classe, the martyred saint with the apostles in the guise of lambs stands in Paradise below a great jeweled cross in a circular field of stars. In the landscape the four rivers issue from a rock and trees are scattered over the ground, covered with herbs and flowers. The vault mosaics of the Tomb of Galla Placidia are resplendent with various kinds of rosettes against a blue ground, indicating the stars of the vault of heaven.[10] Eventually all these descriptive elements came to symbolize, as a kind of shorthand, Paradise, or at least to recall a paradisian garden. Trees, leaves, flowers, stars, rosettes, and the cross all are part of the repertory. The cross, symbol of resurrection and salvation, also carries the meaning of Paradise, as at Sant'Apollinare.

There were several historical crosses of distinct types that passed into general iconographic use during the Early Christian period and were frequently placed on the marble slabs.[11] They had not only differing historical meaning but varying theological significance. Among the most important was the impressively bejeweled cross erected on Golgotha by the Emperor Theodosius II. Our most accurate picture of it is probably in the apse mosaic of Santa Pudenziana, Rome. Another cross which served as a prototype was that erected by Constantine the Great in his Forum at Constantinople. Still another was that which adorned as a finial the sectionally domed vault of the structure covering the actual tomb of Christ in the church of the Anastasis, Jerusalem. There were also particularly venerated processional crosses. A cross on a stepped base derived from that on Golgotha; a cross with splayed arms ending in a concavity into which a disc or ball, a pomegranate or silver apple was inserted recalled the cross on the Forum of Constantine; a cross leaved at the base, surmounting a disc or ball, symbolized that of the shrine of the Holy Sepulchre; while a cross with a narrow projection from the base that could be fitted into a socket signified a processional cross.

The nature of these crosses gave rise to different theological interpretations. The Tree of Life which grew in the earthly Paradise of the Garden of Eden was the cause of death to man, but the tree in heavenly Paradise was life-giving. The actual relic of the True Cross was believed by some to have come from the Tree of Life in Eden, but, saturated by the blood of Christ, it became imperishable and a witness to salvation and Paradise. The earliest monuments of the life-giving cross have at the base foliate elements and at the tips of the arms balls. All these crosses, in differing ways, could signify Paradise.

The existence of these different types explains why crosses of several kinds occur on a single carved slab and by analogy suggests that other motifs common to transennae should also appear in variation on a single example. A white marble slab totally discolored

5 E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman World,* 4, 1954, 43.

6 Paul Underwood, "The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospels," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers,* 5, 1950, 41–138.

7 G. B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform, Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers,* Cambridge, 1959, 70.

8 Underwood, 47.

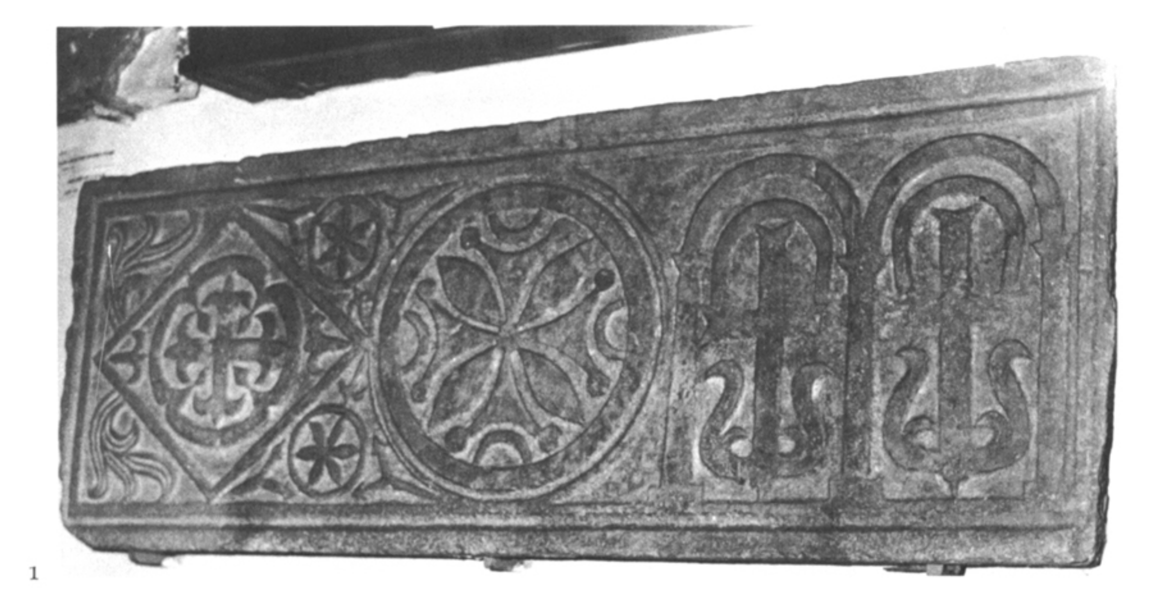
9 A. Grabar, "La 'Sedia di San Marco' à Venise," *Cahiers archéologiques,* 7, 1954, 19–34, 28.

10 Goodenough states (p. 34): "Rosettes were still actively symbolic when Christianity was born, continued to be so into late Christian Byzantine times." Independently, in my analyses of the iconography of the transennae, I came to the same conclusion. The motifs up to at least the 7th century possessed meaning. Afterward they retained the ability to evoke qualities of meaning without being specific.

11 A. Frolow, *La relique de la vraie Croix, Paris,* 1961, 55. *Les reliquaires de la vraie Croix,* Paris, 1965, 178–86, 191. "Numismatique byzantin et l'archéologie des Lieux Saints," *Mémorial Louis Petit,* Mélanges d'histoire et d'archéologie byzantines, Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, Bucarest, 1948, 78–94.

On the basis of numismatic evidence, Frolow states that the Latin type of cross, gemmed and/or with pearls at the tips of the arms, appears first during the reign of Theodosius II; under Tiberius II (578–82) appears a cross on a base of steps; the sphere placed between the cross and its base appears on silver coins of the Heraklid dynasty and on gold coins of Justinian II; a cross with a double bar, recalling reliquaries of the True Cross, appears in the early 9th century, in the reign of Theophilus; whereas crosses with discs or balls at the extremities of their arms have existed since the 6th and 7th centuries, as proved by the ampullae of Bobbio.

See A. Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines de Constantinople (IV–X siècles),* Paris, 1963, 32; T. Talbot Rice, "The Leaved Cross," *Byzantinoslavica,* 11, 1950, 68–81; H. Stern, "Les représentations des conciles dans l'église de la Nativité à Bethleém," *Byzantion,* 77, 1936, 146–52; P. Underwood, esp. 98–99 and 112.


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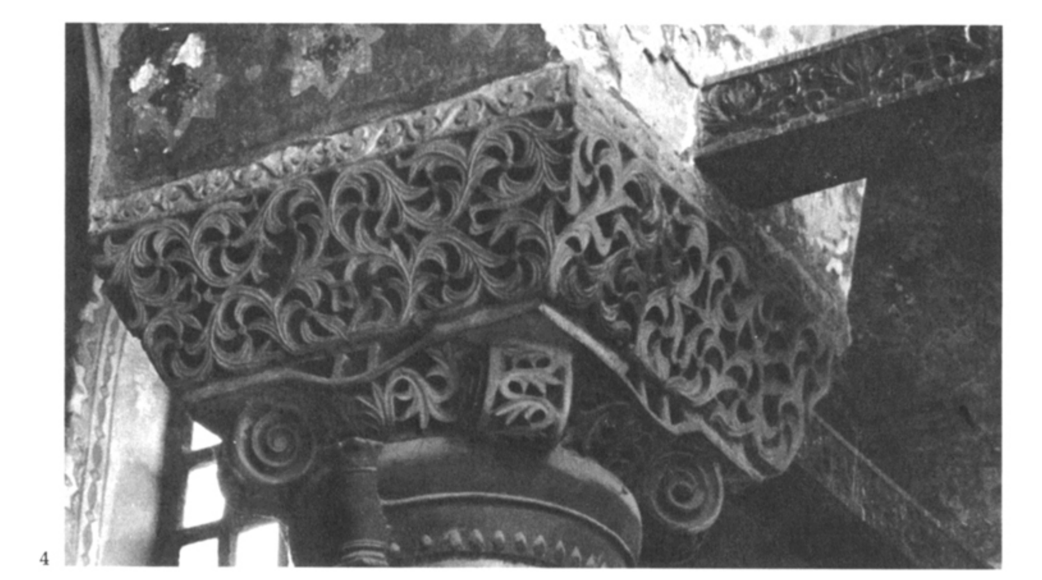

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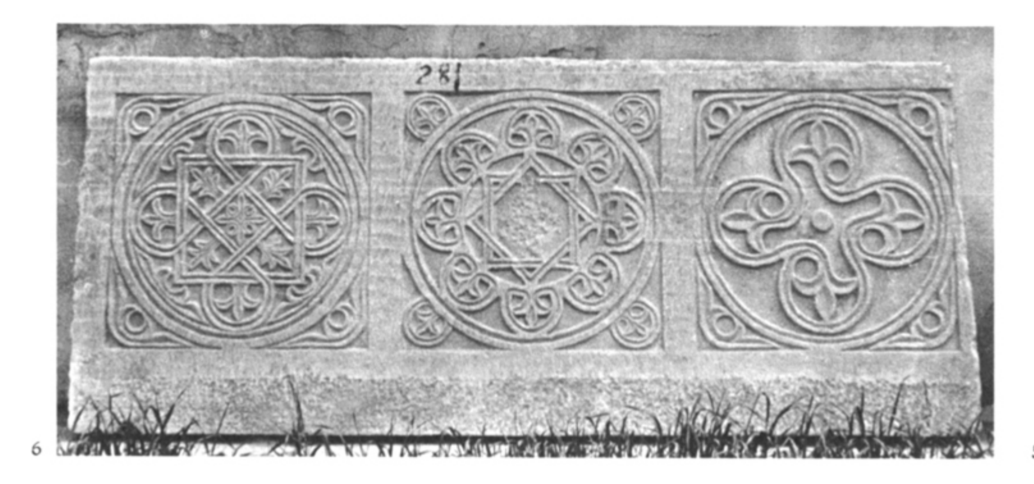

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1. Marble slab, No. 2251 (Mendel No. 730). Istanbul, Archaeological Museum

2. Marble slab. Thessalonika, Saint George

3. Fragment of a marble slab. Thessalonika, Saint Demetrius, crypt

4


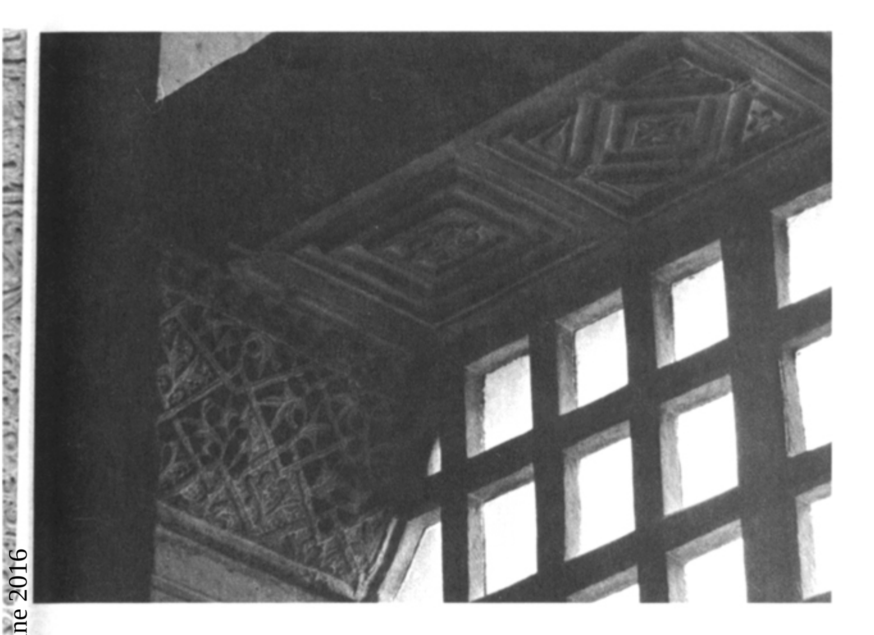
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4. Capital and impost block. Istanbul, Santa Sophia, north gallery

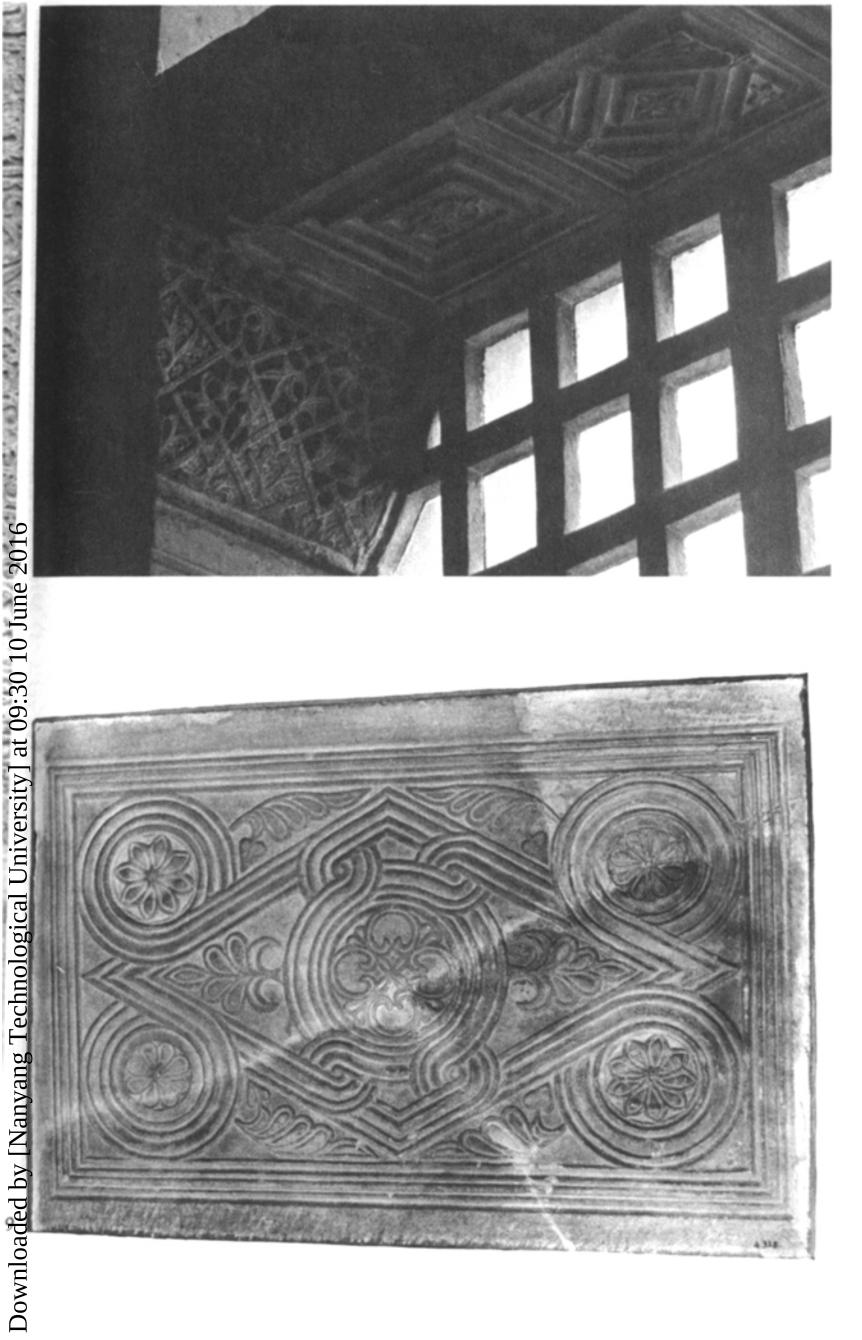
5. Left pier from entrance gate. Konya, Sahip Ata Camii

6. Marble slab, No. 281. Iznik, Archaeological Museum





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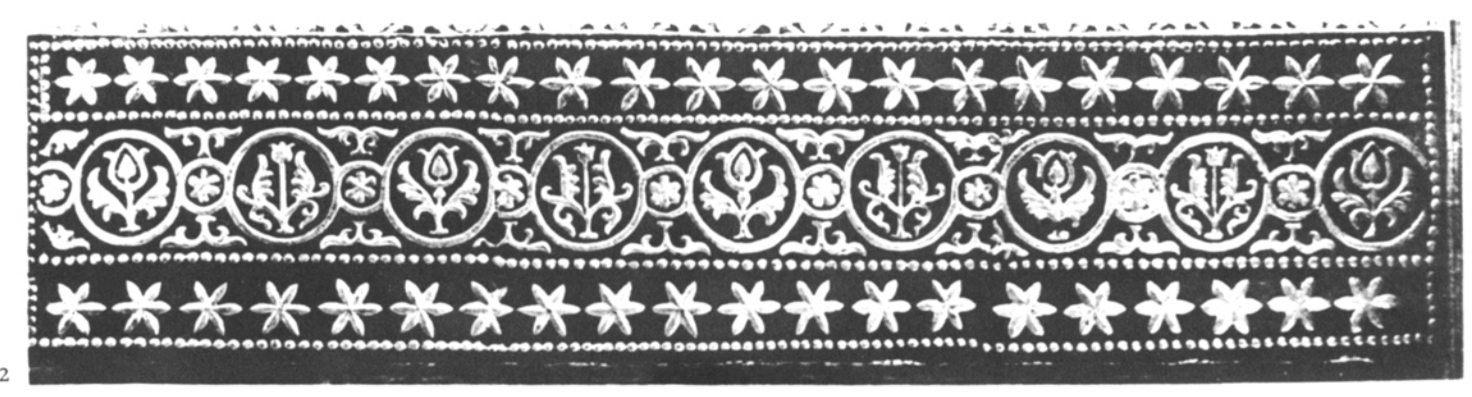
7. Unfinished capital. Istanbul, Santa Sophia, north wall of north gallery

8. Marble slab, obverse side, No. 2906. Istanbul, Archaeological Museum, garden

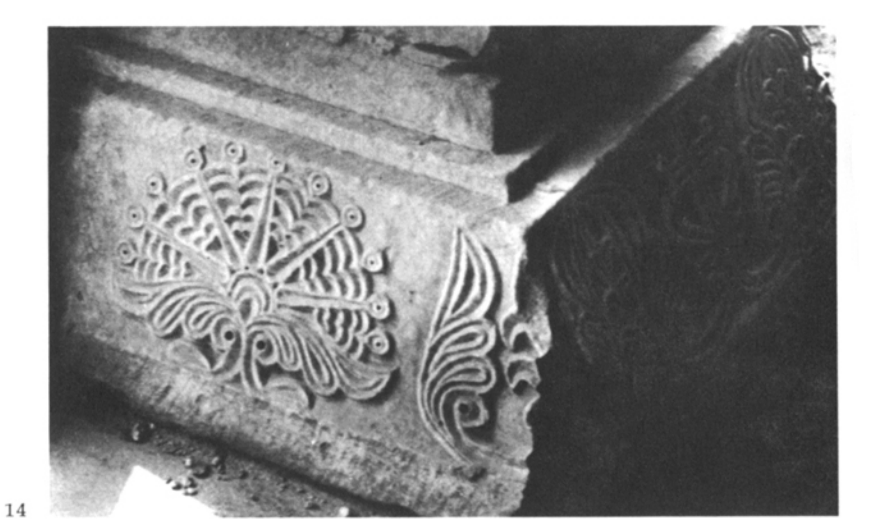
9. Marble slab, No. 4388. Istanbul, Archaeological Museum

10. Reverse side of Fig. 8


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11. Marble slab. Venice, San Marco, treasury tower, south wall, exterior

12. Bronze covering of tie-beams, NE.1. Jerusalem, Dome of the Rock, intermediate octagon (after Creswell)

13. Tie-beam. Istanbul, Santa Sophia, west gallery, central arch

14. Column base. Istanbul, Fenarissa Camii, north church, apse

pink by pigment fallen from the wall to which it is attached in the Archaeological Museum, Istanbul,[12] illustrates this principle, as do two slabs in Thessalonika, one in the collection of the rotunda of Saint George and the other in the crypt of Saint Demetrius.[13] The example in Istanbul (Fig. 1) has two crosses, now disfigured, of the same type placed under arches. To their left, occupying a full two thirds of the space and preventing a centralized composition, are a disk and a diamond. Each is filled with a different major motif which could be interpreted variously as a cross with equal arms or as a central part of a rosette. In this instance it seems to me that the rosettes must be considered as originally being symbols of the same order as the neighboring crosses. It would be easy to deny meaning to the rosettes and to find it solely in the two crosses, but in that case the only explanation of the size and importance of the rosettes would have to rest on aesthetic grounds. Even if such an explanation for this piece is acceptable there still remains the question of the relegation of unquestioned symbols, the crosses, to a minor role in favor of merely decorative devices.

In Saint George, Thessalonika, a slab displays four crosses under an arcade (Fig. 2); all are of a processional type, but the arms of two are simply rounded while those of the others are trilobed. Similarly lobed arms belong to the cross to the right on the fragment in Saint Demetrius (Fig. 3). On its lower edge is a protruberance that prevents it from resting directly on its three-stepped base. The other cross has smoothly rounded tips for all its arms and an additional cross bar, and it rests directly on a two-stepped base. There seems to have been a definite attempt to differentiate iconographically by the forms of the crosses, particularly since they are accompanied by a palm tree with a serpent twining about its length. This tree must be the Tree of Life which caused man's downfall in the Garden of Eden. The cross with double bars and a two-stepped base might represent the cross of Golgotha. Although it is not jeweled, it does carry the bar for the titulus INRI. The other cross is a processional one. The presence of floral elements with both crosses suggests the accretion of various traditions with a resultant vagueness and potential richness or overlap of meanings.

Style—Early Byzantine Period

Justinian's church of Santa Sophia, Istanbul, the Great Church of the Byzantines, was described by contemporaries impressed, as we still are, by the grandeur of its interior space and the opulence of its appointments. About 563, in a long poem, Paul the Silentiary described the ciborium which jutted out into the nave from the eastern apse:[14] "And it is borne aloft on silver columns, on whose tops every arch rests its silver feet . . . and from a broad plan it gradually diminishes to a sharp point, having eight sides of silver. And at the juncture of each to other is, as it were, a long backbone which seems to join with the triangular faces of the eight-sided form, and rises to a single crest, where is artfully wrought the form of a cup. And the edges of the cup bend over and assume the form of leaves, and in the midst of it has been placed a shining silver globe, and the cross surmounts it all." Further on the poet observes the parapets of the stairs mounting to the ambo under the ciborium:[15] "and the whole is cunningly wrought with skillful workmanship, and glitters with ever-changing brightness. In parts it seems that whirlpools eddy over the surface, intertwining under the wandering curves of other circles." In describing the passage from the ambo to the sanctuary he remarked "the balustrade of green Thessalian marble with marble posts of Molossian marble from Phrygia, and a plinth and cornice enclosing the slabs. . . . And resting the wandering glance there one might see snake-like coils twining over the fair marble, winding in beauteous paths; there white and fiery red are set alongside of one another and a flesh colour between both, the lines bending in alternating coils, as they roll round in their courses. First on one side and then on another, are seen the forms of the moon and stars."

None of the transennae described has survived. In the gallery of the church, however, the impost blocks (Fig. 4) above the capitals of the minor columns, of the sixth-century, carry a design probably similar to that of the ambo slabs. Circles opening alternately upward and downward cover the flat plane with their swinging, regular motion. "Intertwining circles winding under the wandering curves of other circles" are also carved on the north face of the northern re-used block of the Seljuk gate to the Sahip Ata Camii at Konya. The sculptured block (Fig. 5) from Konya is the only example of this type of design I have been able to locate in Asia Minor. Certainly there were others, for this kind of precise and exactly balanced composition was current from the late fifth through the seventh century all over the Christian world, including Macedonia, where many examples have been found.[16]

Earlier slabs decorated with circles or part-circles enlaced with, or over, one another are designed with close attention to exact balance of size and precise position of each motif. By the early eighth century in western Christendom a new freedom or change of attitude had occurred. Strict symmetry and even rhythm were subtly altered and exchanged for assymmetry of detail and a syncopation in the movement of the interlaces. This attitude toward the design of marble sculpture persisted and developed strongly with many variations in the Occident until the emergence of the Romanesque style. In the Byzantine world, only a few indications of this stylistic direction are observable. A Byzantine example is in the court of the Iznik Museum (Fig. 6).[17] The panel is divided into three squares, each filled with different but related motifs consisting of squares, vine leaves, and tendrils. The center of the middle panel is defaced

12 G. Mendel, *Catalogue des sculptures grècques, romaines, et byzantines*, Musées impériaux ottomanes, 2, Arkeoloji müzeleri, Constantinople, 1912, No. 730; Museum inv. no. 2251.
13 G. and M. Soteriou, "He Basilike tou hagiou Demetriou, Thessalonike," *Biblioteke tes en Athenais Archeologikes Etaireias*, 39, 1952, pl. 58; the slab is dated 10th–11th century with reference to other (undated) slabs in the collection of Saint George, Thessalonika.
14 W. R. Lethaby and H. Swainsen, *The Church of Santa Sophia, Constantinople*, London and New York, 1894, 47.
15 *Ibid.*, 59.
16 They belong to one of Kautsch's categories, 1939, 13. R. E. Hoddinott, *Early Byzantine Churches in Macedonia and Southern Serbia*, London and New York, 1963. An example showing the evolution of this type of design during the 8th and 9th centuries north of the Alps is found in the church of Schaennis, Canton of St. Gallen, Switzerland, M. Prou, "Chancel carolingien orné d'entrelacs à Schaennis," pl. I. Mem Aclnscr, 39, 1914, 123–38.
17 Museum inv. no. 281.

probably because it had a motif too definitely like a cross. The panel on the right has a great deal of unfilled area as opposed to the other two and does not provide sufficient balance to make a symmetrical division. On the other hand, each square is itself a precisely balanced composition. For these reasons the slab is dated late sixth or early seventh century along with comparable material from Istanbul, Italy, and elsewhere.

The designs discussed above were executed as follows: after squaring and filing a block of predetermined dimensions, the sculptor drew a two-dimensional pattern on the surface. Then he proceeded to chisel away the void areas of the pattern to a uniform depth, creating two major planes connected by ridges or miniature walls at right angles to the upper and lower surfaces. An unfinished capital (Fig. 7) of a wall pier on the north side of the north gallery of Santa Sophia, Istanbul, shows this working procedure. A contrast of black and white between lower and upper surfaces could be developed and controlled depending on the depth of cutting and the normal lighting of the finished sculpture.

Along the soffit running between the two piers (Fig. 7) are three squares carved in a different manner and giving different effects. The sculptor developed more than two planes from the block, and what is more important, he connected these planes by making the connecting ridges convex or concave. A very different plastic effect is achieved which is essentially the opposite of the flat lacelike surfaces of the adjoining capitals. This procedure eventually came to be preferred in Byzantine marble sculpture, and by the late eighth or early ninth century it had practically replaced its sixth-century rival, the "coloristic" style of the Early Christian sculptor.

Common technique, design preferences, and repertory of motifs were found in the whole of the Romano-Christian world through at least the sixth century. Evolution of marble sculpture beyond that time shows two separate and major patterns of development. In the West the aesthetic preference for variations of detail within a traditional context, the avoidance of symmetrically stable compositions, and a purposeful grossness of execution incipient in monuments of the sixth century continue to develop strongly. The developed phase of this tendency is wholly absent in the Byzantine world, with the exception of Western enclaves along the Dalmatian coast.

Problems of Dating

Attempts to date Byzantine slabs have perforce been almost totally based on stylistic observations. A consensus among scholars for the sculptures belonging to the period up to the sixth and seventh centuries has been been possible because of the relative plenitude of examples and the fact that a few are definitely dated by epigraphy or association with dated buildings. Far fewer in number are the slabs dating after the seventh century. Not infrequently an early slab has been re-used and its unfinished side recut, as is the case with an example in the collection of Dumbarton Oaks which has a mutilated sixth-century relief on one side and an eleventh-century high relief of the Virgin, possibly part of a Deisis composition, on the other.

For later material, a few scholarly observations and opinions have had to serve as aids for authors whose primary concern was not carved slabs. The most dependable have been those made by Rudolph Kautsch, who, at the end of his first major article on Western transennae, set forth a complete schema for the evolution of Byzantine slabs.[18] The evidence Kautsch was able to assemble is unfortunately most meager. Dated evidence for the sixth century comes from Saints Sergius and Bacchus and Santa Sophia, Istanbul; for the seventh century, from fragments, now in the Archaeological Museum, Iznik (Nicaea), from the destroyed church of the Koimesis. There is nothing for the eighth century; comparative material for the ninth is from the Koimesis Church at Skripou, Greece, dated by inscription 873/4; for the tenth century there is a dated slab at Afion Karahisar, 934; Saint Luke of Stiris, Phocis, the monastery church at Daphne, and sculptures at the Grand Lavra, Mt. Athos, are cited for the eleventh century. Kautsch found his one dated tenth-century piece in a survey of Anatolian monuments,[19] and he thought he had located another, with a date between 969 and 976, in a publication of Hans Rott.[20] Rott's selection of fragments in a nearby cemetery cannot be accepted, however, as identified with the date of the church building from which they may possibly have come.

K. Michel and A. Struck discussed in detail the exterior decorations of the Little Metropolitan Church, or the Panagia Gorgoepikoos, Athens.[21] This important collection of slabs is perhaps the best known of all because of its use in covering the charming little building in the heart of modern Athens. Specific knowledge of Byzantine monuments has so expanded in the last fifty years as to render Michel and Struck's conclusions of little value. The same is true of the third frequently cited authority, Hans Brockhaus,[22] who published several of the relief panels of the fountain-house at the Grand Lavra, Mt. Athos.[23] In addition to these, more recent scholars such as Anastasios Orlandos, Manoles Chatzedakes, and Georgios and Maria Soteriou have discussed slabs briefly, in passing, and published much of the available evidence in Greece. Most recently George Miles presented a group of slabs, the earliest of which dates

18 Kautsch, 1939, 61.

19 *Monumenta asiae minores antiqua*, 4, Manchester, 1933, 12, No. 38[1], pl. 17.

20 Hans Rott, *Kleinasiatische Denkmäler*, Leipzig, 1908, 287.

21 K. Michel and A. Struck, "Die Mittlebyzantinischen Kirchen Athens," *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, athenische Abteilung*, 31, 1906, 279–324.

22 H. Brockhaus, *Die Kunst in den Athos-Klöstern*, Leipzig, 1924, 40, n. 2, and pl. 8.

23 For example, the fountain-house reliefs, built into a later structure, as the stalactite capitals prove, are dated to 963, founding year of the monastery. Comparative material for the Lavra plaques as well as for all those found in other monasteries of the peninsula is cited in San Marco, Venice, "the sarcophagus of St. Mark . . . from the year 829 . . . the balustrade slabs from the church of 976. . . ," etc.

from the eleventh century, having in common the use of the Kufic script as decoration on border moldings.[24] Unfortunately the isolation of this group does not clarify our problems because the other motifs present belong almost all to the Early Christian repertory, and, particularly in their animal reliefs, represent a definite revival of old themes.

Foliate Style of the Mid-Byzantine Period

In the garden of the courtyard belonging to the Archaeological Museums and the Cinili Kösk at Istanbul is a Proconesian marble slab handsomely carved in relief. Each side offers different motifs of a traditional Byzantine type (Figs. 8, 10). The slab is recorded as having come to the Archaeological Museum from the Arap Camii in Galata.[25] Père Benedetto Palazzo, who first discussed it in detail, attributed a date of the fifth century to the side with two crosses flanking a circle or wreath filled with a rosette-like motif. The surfaces of the rosette-like feature and the crosses are chiseled away. Neither the moldings of the circle nor the vine stems and leaves connecting it to the bases of the crosses are defaced. The other side of the slab, in excellent condition, was dated tenth or eleventh century by Palazzo. Its decorations consist of a relatively long rhomboid made of interlace or strap-work that twists out at the four corners to make circles as well as at the points of the rhomboid to join the framing moldings. The compartments are filled with rosettes or foliate elements.

As was mentioned, the carved elements on both sides of the slab are essentially conservative in type, as are their general compositions. The earlier side can be dated rather accurately in the sixth century by comparison with the transennae in San Clemente, Rome, which have the monogram of Pope John II and can be put between 532 and 535, or by reference to the nearby gallery balustrade slabs of Santa Sophia, Istanbul, of similar date.

The other side is much more difficult to place because there is no dated comparative material. Undated examples of a like nature are relatively easy to find. Some are nearby in the same garden. Others are located, for example, inside the Archaeological Museum, Istanbul (Fig. 9),[26] at Saint Luke of Stiris, Greece,[27] and decorating the fountain-house in the main court of the Grand Lavra, Mt. Athos. One of the most beautiful examples is immured along with other trophies on the south face of the Treasury, San Marco, Venice, flanking the Piazzetta (Fig. 11). None of these examples can be dated even by inference except the carved elements at Saint Luke. Here, however, only a general date of early eleventh century is given the building and consequently its decorations.

As was suggested, the basic schema for the design of the later composition is Early Christian. The interlace, rosettes, and framing moldings are also associated with that period. All the foliate elements, however, are new, or at least foreign to the repertory of motifs appearing on Early Christian transennae. The trefoil half-palmettes, the palmettes at the narrow ends of the rhomboid, and the major feature in the central circle all belong to a style other than the Early Christian. The characteristic quality of these motifs can be identified as Sassanian. It is the mature assertion of this quality in an Early Christian context which marks the style under consideration; the motifs descend from the Sassanian feather palmette, the lotus palmette, the palmette inscribed in the outline of a heart, and the acanthus-derived Sassanian palmette and leaf.

Sassanian monuments in Iran are the earliest on which this type of motif appears. The earliest major examples of this style in the context of the Roman Empire decorate the mosaics and tie-rods (Fig. 12) of the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem (late seventh century), and the mosaics of the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem (ca. 700).[28] The Ommayyad Dynasty adopted the Sassanian motifs during its domination of Syria. Ommayyad influence in North Africa and Spain resulted in the propagation of this style in such places as Kairouan, on the beams of the Great Mosque in the ninth century.[29] It is also found on the carved stone and marble decorations of the palace of Medina Az-zahara and in the mosaic decorations of the mihrab of the Mosque of Cordova in the tenth century.

The style associated with these motifs has come consequently to be called Sassanian-Ommayyad or simply Ommayyad. The same motifs also became part of the Byzantine decorative repertory. It has been thought that the Ommayyad style represents an intrusion in Byzantium during the tenth century.[30] With the recent discovery of Sassanian elements in Byzantine sculptures at the capital during the early sixth century,[31] predating the Arab invasions of Syria and Palestine, this theory has been revised to suggest a revival in the tenth century of Sassanian as well as other styles current in the Justinianic period.[32] Still another explanation of Sassanian motifs in Byzantine art is that they existed at least from the sixth century as part of the Byzantine decorative vocabulary and developed within this context without requiring outside inspiration or a conscious re-

24 G. Miles, "Byzantium and the Arabs; Relations in Crete and the Aegean Area," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 18, 1964, 3–35. Miles concluded that the appearance in Greece, and the total absence in Istanbul and Asia Minor, of the Kufic script was the result of the reconquest of Crete by Nicephoros Phocas from the Arabs in 961. Supposedly Arabic workmen migrated to the mainland and launched the vogue for Kufic. The earliest monuments are at least two generations later in date. It would be fruitful to associate with this material the Spanish reliquaries of gold, silver, and ivory bearing Kufic decorations, as well as the changes in the Georgian script showing the impact of Kufic during the first half of the 11th century. Apparently, other border regions, besides mainland Greece, were seduced by the incomparable beauty of the Arabic writing.

25 Benedetto Palazzo, O.P., *L'Arap Djami ou l'Église Saint-Paul à Galata*, Istanbul, 1946. Museum inv. no. 2906; also published by Jean Ebersolt, *Mission archéologique de Constantinople*, Paris, 1921, pls. 35, 2, and 36, 1.

26 Museum inv. no. 4388, found 1930 near Sen Gulhamam, Istanbul.

27 R. W. Schultz and S. H. Barnsley, *The Monastery of St. Luke of Stiris in Phocis, etc.*, 1901.

28 Marguerite van Berchem, "The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock and the great Mosque in Damascus," in K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Moslem Architecture*, 1, Oxford, 1932; H. Stern, *Byzantion*, 11, 1936, 101–52, and 13, 1938, 415–55, and "Nouvelles recherches sur les images des conciles, etc.," *Cahiers archéologiques*, 3, 1948, 82–105, and "Encore les mosaïques de l'église, etc.," *Cahiers archéologiques*, 9, 1951, 141–45, and "Recherches sur la Mosquée Al-Aqsa et sur ses mosaïques," *Ars orientalis*, 5, 1963, 27–47.

29 Georges Marçais, "Plafonds peints du IX siècle à la grande Mosquée de Kairouan," *Revue des arts asiatiques*, 9, 1935, 1–8.

30 André Grabar, "Le succès des arts orientaux à la Cour Byzantine sous les Macédoniens," *Münchner Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst*, 3rd ser., 2, 1951, 32–60.

31 Cyril Mango and Igor Ševčenko, "Remains of the Church of St. Polyeuctos, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 15, 1961, 243–47.

32 A. Grabar, *Sculptures byzantines*, 100–22.

vival. Supporting this theory are the reliefs recently dated 830±870 on the wooden boxes covering the tie-beams in the arches of the western gallery of Santa Sophia, Istanbul (Fig. 13).[33] In other words, the Sassanian repertory of motifs was indigenous to Byzantine art by the sixth century and developed within its context, reaching a climax of popularity during the eleventh century, as suggested by the superlative reliefs in the Fenarissa Camii, the Church of the Virgin Panachrantos, Istanbul (Fig. 14).

The dominance of Sassanian types of motif is well recognized by scholars of the ornamentation of Byzantine manuscripts. Alison Frantz comments on "the almost inevitable presence of the Sassanian palmette from the eleventh century on" as filler elements.[34] Kurt Weitzmann also discusses the Sassanian elements in Byzantine manuscripts particularly of the tenth century and illustrates many examples, among the most superb being those from the Codex Phillipps 1538, Staatsbibliothek, Berlin.[35]

There is unfortunately no absolute chronological correspondence in the development of similar styles in different media in the history of art. Whereas we can be assured, because of the sculptures of Saint Luke and the Fenarissa Camii, of the eleventh-century prevalence of the Sassanian style in Byzantine carving, we cannot assume on the basis of manuscript illumination that it began in the ninth or tenth century and disintegrated in the thirteenth. Nor is there among various media a total exchange of motifs. For example, Frantz observes, "The whorl, so common in Syrian art, is extremely rare, being represented here by but one example. . . ."[36] The whorl, is, on the other hand, very common throughout the Mediterranean world from at least the sixth to the eleventh century in sculpture and even appears on the Byzantine plaque from the Arab Camii; but this can be explained through iconography, as has been indicated above.

The presence of relief sculptures at Santa Sophia, Kiev, founded 1017–1037,[37] helps in dating more precisely the use of foliate motifs in sculpture. In its present condition, the walls of the church are literally covered with painted ornament of the foliate style. Indeed, Russian archaeologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century exploited this kind of ornament as if it were a national style. Fortunately the frescoes in a room, possibly once a treasury, at the base of the southwestern tower, are not defaced, and in their original condition display an exuberant use of Sassanian motifs.[38] The great mosaic cycles likewise show acceptance of the style, as in the band of lotus palmettes in the main apse, separating the zone of the Eucharist panel from that of the Virgin Orans. The sculptural evidence, on the other hand, lacks any indication at all of the foliate style. Instead the marble sarcophagus usually identified as once belonging to the Grand Prince Yaroslav (d. 1054)[39] is of another type with strong affinities to examples of Thessalonika and to a few in Istanbul. The most appropriate for comparison are the slabs identified by Georgios Soteriou as belonging to the ciborium of the shrine of St. Dimitri in the major church dedicated to the saint at Thessalonika.[40] The marble ciborium replaced a silver one destroyed during the Arab invasion of the city and probably dates in the tenth century. The dating of the Kievan monuments is slightly later but accords satisfactorily in style with the sculptures at Thessalonika. The Kievans lost effective control of the lower Dnieper during the second quarter of the eleventh century because of Mongol raids. Consequently it must have been very difficult to import so large and heavy an object as a marble sarcophagus from Byzantine territory during and after that period.[41] It would seem, therefore, that the sarcophagus of the Grand Prince Yaroslav dates before the second quarter of the eleventh and after the late tenth century.

All the parapet slabs of the galleries of Santa Sophia, Kiev, are made of Volynian slate rather than of marble, as are practically all the architectural details of the lower sections of the Cathedral.[42] The designs of these transennae are all more or less broad interlace, none having any foliate motifs as fillers but rather rosettes and in one case fish and in another an eagle. The sarcophagus identified as belonging to the Grand Princess St. Olga is also of Volynian slate and carries interlace designs on its lid. On its front are motifs like those of the Yaroslav reliefs. Marble sarcophagus fragments with design details like those on the gallery parapets of the interior of Santa Sophia have been found in the area of the earlier Tithe Church.[43] Thus it appears that marble sarcophagi and architectural elements were imported. At a certain moment this commerce was stopped and local craftsmen turned to a fine stone quarried nearby and worked with established designs to satisfy new commissions.

Whereas the existing evidence does not show the presence of foliate motifs in sculpture at Kiev, it does show very clearly the form the interlace strap took in the parapet from the Arap Camii. This consists of a convex band bordered on either side by a deep incision and a narrow ridge. Kautsch believed this form did not occur before the tenth century in Byzantine art because the earliest dated example is the fragment from Afion Karahissar of 934.[44] This type of band occurs in association with foliate motifs at Saint Luke of Stiris. This is not the case at San Marco, Venice, and related monuments. Not only do the foliate motifs occur there practically not at all but the convex interlace band described above is relatively rare as well.

33 Carl Sheppard, "A Radiocarbon Date for the Wooden Tie Beams in the West Gallery of St. Sophia, Istanbul," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 19, 196, 237.
34 Alison Frantz, "Byzantine Illuminated Ornament, a Study in Chronology," *The Art Bulletin*, 16, 1934, 43–76, 57.
35 Kurt Weitzmann, *Die Byzantinische Buchmalerei des IX and X Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1935, 16.
36 Frantz, 58.
37 Olexa Powstenki, "The Cathedral of St. Sophia in Kiev," *Annals of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the United States*, 3–4, 1954, 10.
38 M. K. Karger, Drevnii Kiev, *Akademiai Nauk Ussr, Istitut Archeologii*, 2, 1961.
39 Powstenki, figs. on 100, 104, bottom only 105, line drawings, 102, 103, 108; and N. I. Kresal'nyi, *Sophiiskii zapovidnik u Kievi*, 1959, 136–41.
40 G. and M. Soteriou, 181, 173.
41 The export trade from Byzantium of finished marble pieces for architectural use has never been investigated. The shipwreck of a cargo primarily of transennae of the 6th century has been found off the Sicilian coast (G. Agnello, *Le arti figurative nella Sicilia bizantina*, Palermo, 1962, 117). I would like to thank Prof. Richard Krautheimer for this reference.

The export of sarcophagi carved from St. Béat marble near Toulouse has been the subject of intense analysis and by analogy helps show what might have been the situation for Byzantine commerce.
42 Powstenki, 109.
43 *Ibid.*, 110.
44 Kautsch, 1939, 66.

San Marco was under reconstruction in the second half of the eleventh century—the third church to be erected on the site.[45] Relations with Venice in the eleventh century were probably as congenial or stormy for Byzantium as her relations with Russian Kiev. In any event the major religious structures in both Kiev and Venice attest to the strength of Byzantine art and culture. Santa Sophia, Kiev, is a reflection of a contemporary phase of art in the capital; San Marco, Venice, is a revival of a much earlier period—that of the Roman Empire of Justinian. Hans Buchwald concludes, after a very incisive and convincing analysis, "Many of the capital types, motifs, details, and even the underlying compositional principles, as well as modelling techniques used to ornament San Marco in the late 11th century can, therefore, be derived directly from Early Byzantine examples."[46] "The best explanation of the San Marco 'Renaissance' is, then, probably to be found in the fact that San Marco III was a conscious and, for the High Middle Ages, surprisingly accurate, imitation of the Church of the Holy Apostles. . . . The eleventh century Venetians, therefore, apparently decided to include imitations of Early Byzantine ornament in their effort to imitate an Early Byzantine monument in their city." Buchwald's conclusions are certainly accurate as applied to the great collection of balustrade and other carved slabs at San Marco. These are decorated with a veritable treasure of Early Christian-Byzantine motifs. Among those of the nave there is not a single instance of the foliate style. The convex interlace band occurs on a slab[47] re-used as part of the soffit of the vaults of the west narthex and copied on a corresponding slab,[48] both in very inconspicuous places. A much more prominently displayed plaque is now located on the south wall of the choir screen at Torcello Cathedral.[49] The only other example at San Marco or in the collections of the church is the plaque mentioned above which has been let into the exterior of the base of the tower of the treasury (Fig. 11). It not only has a beautiful instance of the convex strap but also two long narrow panels filled with foliate motifs. The fact that the slab has found a home in this unusual location rather than being assimilated into the general decorative scheme of the interior of the building suggests it had some special significance for the Venetians and need not be considered subject to the same conclusions as the plaques on the interior of San Marco. Certainly its style is not completely paralleled in the Veneto so far as I have found. This permits several conclusions. One is that the motifs on the slab did not represent the Early Byzantine style, nor were they present at San Marco II, rebuilt after the fire in 976;[50] at least if they were, little trace has been left of their presence. For Venetians responsible for reviving the early Byzantine manner, these motifs did not represent it. If, as has been suggested,[51] sculptors or masons from the Veneto took inspiration for some of their techniques and decorative types from contemporary monuments at Constantinople, they certainly did not adopt the foliate style and even refused the convex strap motif.[52] In fact, it seems probable that the patrons and artisans responsible for the rebuilding of San Marco were not interested in what was current or new in Byzantium. If they did borrow, they selected only motifs or elements related to the Early Byzantine period. From the evidence afforded by monuments of the Veneto, it might even be hazarded that Venetian artists kept abreast of the evolution of Byzantine sculpture up to the eleventh century, at which time the stylistic clock was reset at the sixth century and remained there until the establishment of the Latin Kingdom at Byzantium in 1204, making a hiatus of direct interaction, on the artistic level at least, of about a century and a half.

In the three churches—San Marco, Venice; Saint Luke of Stiris, Phocis; and Santa Sophia, Kiev—very different stories are told concerning the presence of Sassanian motifs and the foliate style in sculptural relief. At San Marco, neither during the second half of the eleventh century nor before it is there significant trace of the style. For entirely different reasons, there are no indications of the style in sculpture during the first half of the century at Santa Sophia, Kiev. At Saint Luke of Stiris, on the contrary, the architectural sculptures of the iconastases of both churches are very rich in the motifs in question. Byzantium also has superlative examples of a similar inventiveness in the use of Sassanian elements. These facts indicate that the marble slab from the Arap Camii should be dated in the late tenth to early eleventh century and that beginning during this period transennae were carved in the foliate manner. Saint Luke of Stiris shows a very close dependence on Byzantium in the contemporaneity of its sculptural reliefs. It was not until the final period of Byzantine culture, after the restoration of 1261, however, that Sassanian foliate motifs spread throughout the Empire in a very richly developed manner and in a great variety of media.[53]

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45 O. Demus, *The Church of San Marco in Venice*, Washington and Cambridge, 1960.

46 Hans Buchwald, "The Carved Stone Ornament of the High Middle Ages in San Marco, Venice," *Jahrbuch des österreichischen byzantinischen Gesellschaft*, 13, 1964, 137–70, 167.

47 *Ibid.*, 11, 12, 1962/63, 169–209, fig. 44.

48 *Ibid.*, fig. 42.

49 *Ibid.*, fig. 43.

50 Demus, 69.

51 Buchwald, 1964, conclusion.

52 Slabs at San Marco with Sassanian motifs organized by interlocking Constantinian interlace are published in *La Basilica di San Marco in Venezia illustrata nella storia e nell'arte da scrittore veneziano sotto la direzione di Camillo Boito*, F. Ongania, Venice, 1880–93, 5, Pt. 1, figs. 3 and 4; 5, Pt. 7, fig. 304 (U14). The Sassanian motifs are very similar to those of the tie-rod box of the central bay of the west gallery of Santa Sophia, Istanbul. The strap of the interlaces, however, consists of three parallel ribbons separated by equally broad grooves and seems not earlier than the 13th century.

53 As suggested at the beginning of this paper, conclusions must remain very tentative. This is certainly true concerning those aspects of Byzantine carved marble slabs examined here. Many more phases of the subject could have been developed, such as the new stylistic types current during the Paleologan period, and I hope to discuss them at a later time. My hope now is only that this presentation will provoke interest and further research.